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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 000264

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, S/CT

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [KU](#) [TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: KUWAITIS SHOCKED BY RECENT TERROR INCIDENTS; MANY  
CALL FOR TOUGH ACTION

REF: A. KUWAIT 00244

[B](#). KUWAIT 00185

[C](#). KUWAIT 00174

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment: In the wake of a second shoot-out on January 15 between Kuwaiti security officers and extremists, public calls for increased monitoring of mosque sermons, weapons turn-in programs, and increased security throughout the country indicate a genuine and growing concern among Kuwaitis. Newspapers are reporting in more detail the cache of weapons and plans for terrorist attacks in Kuwait found in the militant safehouses, while displays of Parliamentary multi-partisanship to confront terrorism mark a noteworthy change from the usual contentious infighting. Most Kuwaitis are hesitant to view their country as heading down the same path as Saudi Arabia, but as security is increased throughout the country, personal insecurity increases at a similar pace. Many Kuwaitis, in discussing the issue of growing extremism with the Ambassador and Embassy Officers, are beginning to speculate on the origin and future of extremism in Kuwait. Although many disagree on the particulars, most believe that attacks could continue and that the GOK must firmly address the problem in the near-term. End Summary and Comment.

#### Second Shoot-Out Sparks Special Session

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[1](#)2. (U) Kuwaitis from different political perspectives are openly and widely discussing the meaning of the January 15 shoot-out, the second firefight between extremists and Kuwait security forces in a week, in the Umm Al-Haiman area of Southeastern Kuwait (ref A). During the shoot-out, one Saudi militant was killed and two security officers were wounded. The incident also resulted in the apprehension of three Kuwaiti suspects, while several others managed to escape during the firefight.

[1](#)3. (U) Kuwait's dailies are blaming Saudi militants fleeing the Kingdom's crackdown and Kuwaiti jihadis, fresh from combat in Iraq, for the recent shoot-outs. Newspapers also reported that in addition to a large cache of weapons and bomb-making material found at militant hideouts, there were plans to attack, with car bombs, Kuwait State Security (KSS) HQs and possibly U.S. military convoys. Kuwait's National Assembly has called a special session to take place on February 1, after the Hajj and the extended Eid holiday, to address the rise of extremism in the country. The MPs calling for the session represent all political blocs and they are expected to challenge ministers to explain the GOK's policy to confront the growth of extremism.

#### Prominent Kuwaitis Consider Local Extremism

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[1](#)4. (C) Islamist MP Nasser Al-Sane does not believe that the situation in Kuwait is as serious as it is in Saudi Arabia but told the Ambassador that "everyone is worried" about the two shoot-outs and admitted that no one knew the extent of the problem. Al-Sane said he believed the militants have been in Kuwait for some time, but that they were only exposed after the January 10 attack in Hawally. He added that it was good that they were discovered before more serious attacks happened. Before these attacks, said Al-Sane, Kuwaitis thought that any terrorist attacks involving Kuwaitis would occur in Iraq or at least outside Kuwait. He said that the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, held a special meeting on January 13 to discuss the first attack, but have had little time to arrive at conclusions. The ICM held a more recent gathering in Jahra -- ICM's hub in western Kuwait -- bringing together politicians and religious leaders in a collective front against terrorism. According to Al-Sane, "everybody is fighting against this."

[1](#)5. (C) Dr. Shafiq Ghabra, liberal professor and President of the American University of Kuwait, told the Ambassador during a recent meeting, that the shoot-outs are evidence that the militant Islamists are on the defensive. He explained that Kuwait is being influenced by the grassroots Salafist/Wahhabi movement from Saudi Arabia. He claimed that the Islamist

ideology is falling out of favor with young Kuwaitis who are more influenced by globalization and the U.S. and described the recent attacks as "culturally dirty," saying that it is culturally unacceptable for Kuwaitis of same or related tribes to attack one another. He remarked that these attacks serve as a wake-up call for the GOK and that the government is responding by taking the attack to the extremists.

16. (C) During a January 17 meeting with the Ambassador, National Bank of Kuwait Chairman Mohammed Al-Bahar and CEO Ibrahim Al-Dabdoub said that much of the GOK's past reluctance to crack down on extremism is due to the growing influence of the Islamist bedouin. Al-Bahar and Al-Dabdoub traced the rise of the bedouin influence to the 1950s, when the merchant families of Kuwait began to express an interest in "pan-arabism." To counter the merchant families, they explained, the Al-Sabah ruling family gave citizenship to many of the bedouin and brought them in to the political arena to "even out the balance" with the merchant families. Now that many of the Kuwaiti bedouin are populating the rank-and-file at government ministries and are instrumental in electing Islamist MPs, their influence continues to grow and they outnumber the "original Kuwaitis," according to Al-Bahar. Both bankers agreed that the merchant families and the Al-Sabahs are feeling political pressure from the bedouin tribes and that both are threatened by the growing influence of the bedouin tribes who increasingly espouse an intolerant Islamist ideology.

17. (U) ICM Secretary General Bader Al-Nashi summed up in a memo the reasons for the emergence of violent extremism in Kuwait. The memo included the participation of youth radicalized by foreign wars, the influence of worldwide persecution of Muslims, media exaggerations that provoke young Muslims, a lack or ignorance of proper mechanisms to address societal problems, American military presence in the region, and the emergence of U.S. policies toward social, educational, and political reforms in the region.

#### Rank-and-File Kuwaitis Split on Source of Extremism

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18. (C) PolOff met with many National Assembly professional staff members representing a broad political spectrum. There is a general, although not universal, split between Islamists and liberals on the issue of Kuwaiti extremism. Liberals believe that the GOK must crackdown more harshly and show less leniency toward militants. They believe that this is the only way to end the growth of extremism in Kuwait. Islamists argue that militants must be co-opted and not tortured or harassed. While no mainstream Islamists endorse violence, they appear sympathetic to the plight of the "misguided" militants and are urging the GOK not to torture suspects reasoning that such actions would only create more hatred toward the government and lead to more violence.

-- One Kuwaiti told PolOff that these attacks are just the beginning. He said emphatically that the tribes are upset that some of their own were tortured by KSS and now those individuals are lashing out. He thought the tribes might protect those militants, if necessary, and believed that many more attacks would occur.

-- A prominent liberal staffer in the Secretary General's office at the National Assembly argued for a tougher crackdown on terrorists. He didn't think that the extremists would resort to bombings, but he expected more attacks. He blames the mainstream Islamists for remaining in their "ivory towers" to comment on insignificant Qur'anic issues rather than reaching out to the Kuwaiti street to address the growth of religious misinterpretations that lead to violence.

-- Another said the problem is that there is no central religious authority for Sunnis as there is for the Shi'a. He explained that every Sunni community has a different interpretation of the Qur'an and this decentralized system leads to great misinterpretation and therefore to violence. He also said he expected more attacks and had little confidence that Kuwaiti security elements would be able to prevent future attacks.

-- A senior staff member on the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs committee was completely convinced that Kuwait State Security (KSS) and Kuwaiti police would prevent future attacks. He remarked that he was not concerned about the situation and did not expect any terrorist attacks in Kuwait. He said that terrorism and extremism are alien to Kuwait, a refrain heard regularly by PolOffs until the shoot-outs of the past week.

#### Increasing Focus on Mosques

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19. (U) There is an increasing realization that some mosques are inciting Kuwaitis to violence. Arabic-language newspapers are reporting that Fawwaz Al-Otaibi's Imam, Amer

Khlaif, showed to his followers video of Americans being beheaded and instructed them to strive to do the same. (Note: Fawwaz Al-Otaibi was the Kuwaiti extremist killed in the January 10 shoot-out. End Note.) Khlaif, a 29-year old Imam and preacher at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, is a suspect in the two shoot-outs and is known as the spiritual mentor of Kuwaiti jihadis in Jahra, including Al-Otaibi. Al-Otaibi's family is publicly calling for GOK supervision of mosques and one news daily remarked that these recent acts of violence began in the mosques. Some Kuwaitis are calling for more supervision of mosque activities for fear their children could be swayed to commit violent acts and one muezzin suggested that any "abnormal" gathering in a mosque should be reported to the police.

10 (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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